

## Issue Paper for Oregon Technical Advisory Committee

<b>Topic:</b>	Local Work Group-Basin Work Group Restructuring
<b>Presenter/ sponsor:</b>	Meta Loftsgaarden, Partnership Liaison, NRCS Kevin Conroy, High Desert Basin Team Leader, NRCS
<b>Issue Statement:</b>	Based on statutory changes (see background below) to the structure of local work groups in the 2008 Farm Bill, NRCS staff recommend restructuring local work groups based on a combination of watershed, social, political and geographic boundaries. Basin work groups would remain structured as is, with additional responsibilities. The Oregon Technical Advisory Committee would remain structured as is. Local work groups and basin work groups will be considered as subcommittees of OTAC.
<b>Action Required:</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> Review and Discussion  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advice Requested         </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> Information  <input type="checkbox"/> Other:         </div> </div>
<b>Background:</b>	<p><b>Statutory Changes...</b>With changes in the 2008 Farm Bill, local work groups now have the statutory authority to include members from groups in addition to federal, state and local units of government. Under the statute, local work groups become a subcommittee of the state technical committee and are provided the same exemptions from the Federal Advisory Committee Act.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Subtitle G – State Technical Committees...Section 1262. Responsibilities...(d) FACA Requirements. (1) Each state technical committee shall be exempt from the Federal Advisory Committee Act. (2) Local Working Groups – For purposes of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, any local working group established under this subtitle shall be considered to be a subcommittee of the applicable State technical committee.</i></p> <p>This provides an opportunity to greatly expand the membership of the local working group to include all individuals and organizations interested in contributing to natural resource conservation.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Basin Work Groups</b></p> <p><b>Currently...</b> Basin work groups were established at the recommendation of OTAC as a standing OTAC subcommittee. The goal of basin work groups is to provide the same level and diversity of collaboration as OTAC, but at the basin scale. The basin work group includes representatives from any organization (federal, state, local, private) with a vested interest in natural resources in the basin. Participation includes those with resources to contribute toward local priorities (financial assistance, technical assistance, assistance in meeting regulations, decision-makers)</p> <p>Basin Work Groups can also be a forum for sharing new ideas relating to resource issues. These meetings can be a place to share new projects, new technologies or other strategies for addressing resource concerns. Ideas may come from within the basin or from neighboring basins.</p> <p>Currently, basin work groups oversee distribution of 25% of the basin's EQIP funding. Funding can be distributed for priority natural resource concerns and/or geographic areas.</p> <p>Based on recommendations from OTAC in February, basin work groups have been expanding their membership and increasing their visibility in the basin.</p>

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**PROPOSED Structure of basin work groups...**Basin work group structure and participation will focus on those organizations/agencies/individuals that can invest in natural resource priorities in the basin. The basin work group will be a forum to assist in coordinating funding for local projects. Each organization retains control over their own funding, but this group will help facilitate the leveraging of investments for local projects. NRCS and its partner organizations will clearly identify priorities and parameters for funding so local groups understand agency/organization priorities as they prioritize local projects for funding.

**WHO would participate?** Agencies and organizations with funding or other resources (expertise, volunteers, land, etc.) to invest in local natural resource projects. Members of local work groups are invited and welcome to attend, but given the limited time that many local volunteers have to spend in meetings, local work group attendance at a basin work group meeting is not mandatory.

**PROPOSED Responsibilities...** From the NRCS perspective, basin work groups will be required to:

- Provide recommendations to distribute 25-70% (as determined annually by the state conservationist) of EQIP funding to local offices based on locally established natural resource priorities and their link to agency/basin priorities
- Assist local groups (local work groups and others) in understanding agency/organization funding priorities (and funding opportunities) as they establish local priorities. Provide recommendations regarding natural resource priorities for other programs as requested by the state conservationist
- Review Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, Conservation Innovation Grants and Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative proposals that are developed in the basin prior to review at state/national level to ensure projects address local resource priorities
- Serve as a natural resource advisory group as needed within the basin;

### **Local Work Groups**

**Prior 2008 Farm Bill...** Local work groups were limited in their participation by the Federal Advisory Committee Act to federal, state and local units of government. A public comment opportunity is provided at each meeting. Currently, local work group responsibilities include: providing recommendations for Farm Bill Program Delivery at the local level; recommending resource concerns to address through USDA programs (ranking and screening); recommending policy based on resource information; recommending USDA program delivery priorities and forwarding recommendations to the basin or state level as appropriate

Oregon is a very diverse state. As such, participation in local work groups varies, depending on the location. Some areas of the state have success in getting the best participation with a group based on county boundaries. Others see an opportunity for increased success when organized by watershed or other geographic considerations.

**PROPOSED Restructuring local work groups...**As a part of the continued effort to address natural resource concerns on a watershed basis, it is recommended that local work group boundaries be restructured where appropriate. Proposals will be developed based on the distribution that will best address local resource needs while

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	<p>taking into account the best structure to encourage participation in the group. If NRCS and local partners desire to change the current boundaries, they will develop proposals for local work group boundaries based on a combination of watershed, political, natural resource, geographic and social boundaries. Local work groups can cross political and basin boundaries.</p> <p><b>PROPOSED Process for approval...</b>Boundary changes will be approved by the state conservationist based on recommendations from the basin work group and OTAC.</p> <p><b>WHO would participate? With the changes authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill,</b> local work groups will be a sub-committee of the Oregon Technical Advisory Committee and will be made up of any individual, organization or agency with a vested interest in natural resource conservation in the delineated area. This could include (but is not limited to) state and federal agencies, conservation or irrigation districts, county agricultural organization representatives, local members of conservation organizations, RC&amp;D or other councils.</p> <p><b>PROPOSED responsibilities for local work groups...</b>Local work groups will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provide recommendations on local natural resource priorities</li> <li>○ Provide recommendations on ranking criteria for programs as appropriate.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, local work groups may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Seek collaborative solutions to complete local watershed health implementation strategy</li> <li>○ Seek collaborative investments for components of strategy through partners at the basin work group, providing opportunities to invest at a higher level in local natural resource priorities</li> <li>○ Develop priority recommendations for review by the basin work group; basin work group will then distribute funding based on projects that match local resource priorities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Advantages...</b> This proposed structure focuses on natural resource needs over political boundaries; allows flexibility for basins and local work groups to operate as determined by NRCS and partners.</p> <p>Based on proposals from the local work group, basin work groups will determine fund distribution based on how closely proposals tie to natural resource priorities in the local area.</p>
<b>Progress/ Current Status:</b>	Proposed
<b>Technical/ Staff Recommendation:</b>	Acceptance of proposal
<b>Attachment:</b>	None